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THE CENTENNIAL SITUATION OF WOMAN.

ADDRESS

OF

HON. ALEXANDER H. BULLOCK,

AT THE COMMENCEMENT ANNIVERSARY OF

MOUNT HOLYOKE SEMINARY,

MASSACHUSETTS,

JUNE 22, 1876.

WORCESTER:
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ADDRESS.

If I were to adapt my theme precisely to this presence and this occasion, I should perhaps confine myself to some of the methods employed in educating the sex to which this institution has been set apart. But a good reason for thrusting this duty aside may be found in my own unfitness for it, arising by no means from a want of interest in the subject,—for that interest, even if it had been dim before, your countenances alone would brighten to-day,—but springing rather from my habits of life and occupation, which have not held me in objective intimacy with that delicate inquiry, the most important of our time. Neither does this day nor this school need me in that duty, which has been so well discharged by your speakers of former years, especially and most completely by the President of this institution, to whose studies and labors your sex is under many and great obligations, and mine is under more and greater obligations. Whilst, therefore, I aim to keep myself in sympathy with the spirit of your anniversary, you will permit me to

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turn away from the exact reasoning and analysis, supported by a professional experience, which that duty would require,—and as a loyal citizen of America, speaking to her equally loyal daughters, to invite you within that magical centennial circle, from which in this present year all our institutions and experiences pass out in review. The restrictions of the hour will permit me to touch only in a desultory manner upon a broad consideration of the situation of woman at the close of another centenary. The progress of civilization and the advance of the whole race in the course of a century covers for the most part meliorations in which both sexes share alike, nor in a just sense can there be any benefit for the one which is not also a benefit for the other; and yet in certain fields of improvement women have been so distinctively the beneficiaries of the last hundred years, that their condition in this particular stands apart from the general advancement of mankind, and challenges our special attention.

The position of the sex in the view of social science, as factors in our systems of political economy and industry, takes precedence in every discussion of the situation. The merely sentimental relations of what is called woman's mission, the treatment of her as a poetical being whose primary office is to attract and charm, are essentially modified in this later age by the lessons of a practical and

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working world. We are met in the outset by the conspicuous fact, that at the present time in Great Britain and in our own country, which in this respect I adopt as the best exponents of modern civilization, a very large proportion of women, under the liberal methods of our industry, are earning their living; and although this may seem a topic of ungentle features to be presented before young ladies mounting on the wings of exhilaration to more airy spheres, it nevertheless represents the most important advancement which their sex has made in the events of the century. The significant part of it is, that they have made this advance for themselves, and that men have not made it for them. In the earlier ages their position was the natural result of their inferiority in physical strength; and accordingly handmaids rather than helpmates, slaves rather than companions, are not only historical characters of savage life, but are actual and existing characters in the lowest and least educated portions of civilized life. I am aware that in our traditions and our literature it has been the accepted phrase, that woman is maintained by father, or husband, or brother. This theory is a type of real existence in exceptional circles at all times, and has much to recommend it. Certainly it is attractive to a man of cultivated tastes, that he may turn aside from the dusty avenues of his own daily offices, and refresh

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himself by the very presence of a refined and spiritual being, whom he treats sometimes as a saint and sometimes as a spoiled child ; nor is this practice apt to be rejected by the saint or the child. But in point of fact, speaking of the sex as a whole, this has never been more than a partial truth, and wherever it has been true at all, it has not been generally to their advantage. In periods when there were only the gentlewoman and the low-born woman, the one was indeed maintained by the other, but the one also belonged to the other, or to the master of both ; and self-dependence, whether ideal or actual, was as unknown as the electric telegraph. In the progress of time the uprising of a middle class, and the introduction of shop-keeping and textile manufactures, stimulated the dead level of female life ; and in the subsequent growth of this middle class, which in every nation has come to be the social bulwark, in the varied division of industries, in the widening opportunities to assert and maintain their individuality, women have escaped the pernicious condition which formerly darkened the best portions of Europe, under which, for want of occupation for independent maintenance, the daughters were shut in to the alternative of an enforced marriage or an enforced convent,—and whatever else woman was made for, I do not believe she was made for a marriage or a nunnery against her will.

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Now in this extent of her emancipation,—if I employ the right phraseology,—the last hundred years have witnessed a constantly increasing exaltation in her situation as a component of our civil economy, which surpasses the attainment of five or ten preceding centuries. Her part in the business of life, diffusing its influence over all common and all cultivated ranks, and changing the entire form of society, is one of the amazing facts of our time. Twenty years ago—I have not seen the later returns—of six millions of women above twenty years of age in England and Scotland, it was found that three millions, or one half of the whole number, were special in the industries and were independent supporters,—and some writers expressed the opinion that there were not fifty thousand in England who were not in some manner industrial and self sustaining. I regret that from the returns of our own census I cannot derive a clear and satisfactory statement, but it is obvious to all of us that the result would not be unlike the English conclusion. No doubt the industries of female life in Massachusetts, leaving out the department of agriculture, bear a close resemblance to those of England, and the lesson derived from them is a characteristic of this generation. Under our changed and more liberal political economy the need and supply of female industry has proved to be one of the most

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active agencies of social improvement, and has advanced the sex to independence and equality. This has not come from their own assertion or ambition, but it has been the growth of their necessities and their virtues. It has grown up out of the commercial spirit of the age, which has been their educator and benefactor. While man, heretofore arbiter of the social law, of his own volition would have preserved woman in the fancied unworldliness with which his reading and imagination associated her, the genius of modern commerce has led her out into its fair and open field, where the magnets of a hundred occupations attract her, and in following them neither is the bloom of her character sullied, nor her place in the household abandoned, nor her religion profaned. Occupation, widened in its variety and raised in its quality, presents her everywhere on high ground under the divine and human economy, and presents her nowhere lowered in the scale of immortal being. Emerged from seclusion and dependence to the light of active life, she yet holds in her own hand the veil of her own protection. Her steps are out over the state. She is mistress of the advancing corps of educators,—she ranks among the enlightened authors of poetic and didactic creations,—she assists with clean hands the power of the press, the modern regulator,—she is the indispensable adjunct and sometimes the principal in at

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least one of the learned professions,—she draws her passionate intuitions in imperishable colors over the field of art,—she transfers finest perceptions over the finger to handiwork of utility and beauty,—she raises manufactures by withdrawing them from the shop to the house,—she takes possession of the doors of trade and establishes what is orderly and becoming for the rule of the place,—she transmutes her own spirit and taste by daily labor into the national character,—she alike creates and adorns whatever of hospitality we enjoy, she makes the law of beauty the law of the table, she makes home a refuge, a school and an altar. It is an era of woman brought to independence by the unwritten, irreversible laws of political economy,—of her advancement under the influences of a commercial age. The last fifty years have seen old barriers broken down, which can never be restored, new avenues opened, which can never be closed, over which her advancing step has not been so much the movement of her design, as it has been the fulfilment of her destiny. This hand of social reform has been gentle but resistless.

This great change in the social condition has not been effected without corresponding change in the civil rights of women. In Great Britain much has been gained by equitable legislation in half a century, and much remains yet to be accomplished before a

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just legal relation will be established between the sexes. In our own commonwealth the progress in this province of legal reform has been such as to leave little remaining to be desired. I dare say some of the younger states may be in the lead of us in this respect, but without knowing precisely how that may be, I am warranted in selecting Massachusetts as presenting a model of the legal status of the rights of women, and as a representative of the general tendency of American legislation. The condition of the rights of married women under the law has been a fruitful subject of discussion for a long period, but at last in our own state at least, it must be admitted that the sceptre of the master, whether the sceptre and the master be real or imaginary, has substantially departed. For a general statement, a hundred years ago the common law of England was the prevailing rule here, and in that law there was a degree of unjust inequality which cannot and ought not to be defended. It bore some flavor of the early time, when the physical weakness of woman appears to have been the measure of her rights,—it tasted more distinctively of the feudal ages, when chivalry invested her with a sort of ideal dignity but continued to handle her with gloves of mail,—it carried a part of the spirit of Teutonic equality and more of Roman equity, to which some of her present immunities, including that of dower,

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may be traced back for their origin. But as a rule, upon her marriage, it swept into the hands of her husband the main body of her personal property and personal rights. I allow that he in turn incurred some serious incumbrances and liabilities, but they by no means corresponded in importance to those which she surrendered. Without doubt the theory of his possession, was held to fit the theory of her protection. But after all that can be said in explanation or extenuation, for the greater portion of her civil rights, a century since, a woman married was in a state of civil subjection which according to the analogies of other improvements ought to have been removed a century before that time. But in the spirit of freedom of modern commerce, and in the power of education, this injustice from root to branch has mostly been swept away. By successive stages of legislation, commencing almost immediately after the adoption of the state constitution in 1780, followed up from interval to interval, and culminating in the sweeping law of 1874, the whole force of these inequalities has yielded before the paramount equities of the situation ; and to-day the personality, the independence of woman, in civil rights under the law, stands out the crowning achievement of this commonwealth. If the making of the laws had been in her own hands, I do not believe that they could be more beneficent.

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Nor has her relation to marriage been less generously touched by the hand of time. According to the old usages of England, of which the sanction and obligation is not yet gone by, the ecclesiastical laws and the ecclesiastical courts were infected by the spirit of the Papal Church, and that spirit always fell upon women in matrimony with the force of a vermilion edict. I know it may be said, that in dealing with the two persons in this relation of life, the same rule reached to both parties within the bond, and yet, such is man and such is woman, in their different spheres of liberty and action, that contumely, tyranny or wrong in that sacred relation found five sufferers on the weaker side, where it found one on the stronger side. The questions which arise in marital alienation involve not solely the right of woman to her property and her children, —though that is grave enough for most broad and solemn justice,—but they involve her right to herself, to her self-respect, to a good place in the social scale, to her "maiden meditation," to the freedom of her heart, and the holiness of her love. It may be granted, that in the spirit of the espousal she is bound by a sacramental tie ; but it is not an eternal compact under wrong. In our own recent time Prussia, Austria and France have been struggling for the recognition of marriage as a civil contract, and the German mind is winning the day from

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Rome to justice. In no American state, so far as I know, has marriage ever been treated in the European sense as a sacrament, nor is there any possibility that it ever will be so treated; but in some of the older states of this Union, at the time referred to, the right to a release from an unnatural or perverted alliance was treated with a severity, which as with a flaming sword would fain drive the ill-starred pair back to an impossible paradise. Here again the silent forces of political economy have been the pioneers of the legal reform. So many and so grave were the civil incongruities of enforced union, where its spirit had been extinguished by neglect or abuse, so frequent and serious the conflict in the relative positions of both persons in cases of separation not recognized by law, so impossible under the ancient laws equitably to adjust irreconcilable questions as to children and property, that more liberal and humane statutes were called in to cut the knot and to furnish relief and remedy. I believe that we are now living under a more just and suitable construction of marital relations, than any century has before enjoyed. The reform has been broad in the interest of women. In the diverse treatment of the subject under the jurisdiction of so many states no doubt it is difficult to close the door against all immoral effects ; but taking the state in which we reside for our field of observation, I am

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convinced that the welfare of women in marriage has been promoted, in the last forty years, more nearly to a perfect condition, than could have been conceived under the ancient systems of the world. Their immunity of person and property, their right to release from oppression practiced under the certificate of a wedding, their opportunities of return to their own industry, their own affections and their own religion, are advanced to a degree which suits to their moral and social necessities ; which accords with a civilization built up on the overthrow of ecclesiastical dogmatism and superstition, too long received under the name of conservatism.

But the chief motive cause in the elevation of the sex during the last part of the century, has been the quickening power of education. If the Reformation of the sixteenth century sent forth any triumphant lesson to pervade the world, it was the opinion that the right of private judgment must be accompanied by the education of those who are to employ it. But though the sentiments of Luther tended in that direction, so unfamiliar was that age with the conception of woman rising above her recognized sphere, that it remained for later time to bring home to her the beneficence of the vital principle upon which alone complete Protestantism can stand. Conventual houses bore some fruit of education, but it was intended and was kept limited in its

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uses ; the birds might practice their voices within, but they might not send out their heavenly airs over the waiting communities. And not until the work of the protestant reformers had been supplemented by political freedom, not until free expression of thought had been circulated by the wings of commerce, was the way prepared for this later blessing. And it was a long time in coming. Chivalry had cast about a chosen few of its heroines an artificial glare, but it was the flame of gallantry and not the light of knowledge. The superstitions of the church for hundreds of years dropped around the mass of the sex a drapery of exclusion and ignorance which was impenetrable to light. The church has been to them, in too many instances, a mysterious and uncertain guardian. We are accustomed to say that their social exaltation has come out of christianity, and so I believe,—but not altogether out of its professional ministers and teachers. Even in our time, the church has been a doubtful guide for conducting them to the culture which would alike animate their industries and irradiate their homes. We have been told that the late unfortunate Empress of the French, under inspiration of the southern custodian of the conscience of France, was industrious over the spiritual condition of her charge, including the imperial consort; but I have never heard that she received from the same consecrated source any

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instructions to aid in raising up six or eight millions of benighted peasant women out of gross ignorance by the magical touches of education. My clerical friends around me will pardon me for the suggestion, that even in our generation protestant clergymen, in treating this delicate subject, may have too often overlooked the ways of worldly wisdom. If one-half of the force of learning and intellect, which in assemblies and synods, in councils and pulpits, has been expended upon the question whether a man with three or four motherless children may or may not marry the sister of the deceased wife, had been devoted to the living, impending question, of educating all the girls in the village with sweet graces for wives and tender fitness for mothers, perhaps christianity would not have lost any credit as the renovater, nor its preachers any honor as benefactors. The result of a different procedure has been, what might have been expected, that the widowers in apparently increasing numbers have continued to marry the sisters, and maidens in numbers altogether too large have neglected to educate themselves for married life. But protestant christianity, selecting other agencies of influence, has brought its enginery to bear upon the work of female education. The great spiritual hero of the Reformation sounded the key-note for the uprising of the sex, and commercial communities, stimulated

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by the spirit of true religion, and the conscious power of education, have helped the movement forward never to go back.

More than a century ago, there was among a few of the supreme women of Europe a culture of which the splendor has descended to us in tradition and letters. It came from a conventual and aristocratical education, which in some respects has rarely been surpassed. For elegance and refinement of the written and spoken word, for wit enforced by animal spirits, for talent enlivened by ardor of imagination and sustained by constitutional gaiety even in the shadow of old age, a limited number of the women of France, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, have left a celebrity which still abides in literature and society. For truthful expression and natural manners the letters of Madame de Sévigné have long been a social classic in Europe, and have been deemed so worthy of study in our country that Mr. Everett warmly commended them to the young ladies of Massachusetts. Several others attained to similar fame in conversation and letter-writing, a province in which women are natural authors. The letters of Mesdames du Deffand and de Choiseul, and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, not to extend the list, have made their sex illustrious in the annals of genteel education. In and around the English court life in the last age were memorable literary

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exemplars. But this development was confined to a small class, and was more brilliant than worthy of imitation. Many of the characters were such types of their sex as Horace Walpole was a type of ours. They trifled with the solemn realities of duty, and employed intellect to flatter the weakness and the vices of society. It was a culture of graces and not of the reason and the heart,—which "turned mortal life into a fine dream, and presented death as but a drooping of the garlands of a feast from which the guests have departed." It was an era of theatric pageant of life, in which the modest millions of the ranks of the sex could have no part to act. Anything like the need of an open field for the education of the greater number, was not recognized in the opinion of that day, and that recognition was slow in appearing.

The present American system of female education is the result of a long conflict with unenlightened public sentiment, a triumph over prejudices which have had no analogy in the other ways of our life. The river which sweeps with graceful curvature under the ceaseless challenge of yonder sentinel of the valley, bringing to your doors the lessons of an undying master, the incitations of a perpetual poem, is the witness and interpreter of my topic. Upon either of its shores all other advancements were made full six scores of years before this one. Every

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successive invention or discovery of agriculture was brought to use in the cultivation of this alluvion, —every stage of applied science was quickly seized and appropriated by the practical and mechanical arts,—inquisitive and progressive theology under Edwards and his successors sounded through generations up and down the Connecticut,—civil freedom and political science was never without a patron and teacher in Hawley and Strong, in Mills and Bates, in Allen and Ashmun,—genius of world-wide fame gathered boys at its feet for instruction on the heights of Northampton,—all the churches and all the ministers within a forty-mile circle put themselves for ten years under self-denying ordinances, until a college for young men should be set in the swelling landscape of Amherst ;—while, in all that long period, the idea of a seminary for the education of young women, existed, I suppose, among the eternal decrees,—certainly fifty years ago it existed nowhere else. In England the condition was not less deplorable. In the comparatively recent life-time of Sydney Smith female education was so utterly disregarded, that in one of the most vigorous papers of that extraordinary man, he sought to enlist for the subject the interest of his countrymen by a course of arguments which we have now so far outgrown, that if I were to employ them here to-day you would deem them scarcely above platitudes

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and truisms. The difficulty in the way was an indurated and concealed popular belief of the inutility and inexpediency of encouraging culture in the sex,—a belief so rooted in the prejudices of men, that in some natures it still exists lurking as a subtle poison, unacknowledged because publicity in our day would be shame. It is no longer respectable to be indifferent to this subject; and whenever in any work of reform that stage is reached, the victory is already won. The first dawn of this moral revolution was in Massachusetts, and the civilized world concedes the fact by adopting the example. When free education for both sexes, as a municipal duty to be enforced by law, became here the public interpretation of state obligation, the finger of transfiguration touched the destiny of woman, nor can any reaction ever set it back. Limited for generations by the public poverty, it has for generations been increasing with the public wealth and the relaxation of ancient prejudice, until a respectable standard of culture is now required by law in equal degree for the one sex and the other. The cloud of prejudice has lifted from public opinion, the vision of duty has expanded, the scope of legislation has widened, and to-day all over the United States the acknowledged right of equality in the mental relations of the sexes is a part of the atmosphere we breathe.

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Direct Aid from the Treasury.

In adopting the rule of aiding from the treasury of the state the higher seminaries of female education, some of the newer states have larger claims to gratitude than our own commonwealth. We may rejoice that in the West, along those parallels of latitude which the bracing air of freedom and intelligence pervades, where the influences that are to control the future of this country are rapidly taking grace and culture, government patronage opens its gates to the largest development of the daughters. In some of those imperial commonwealths the doors of state universities are thrown wide open to both sexes. I equally regret that the past error of Massachusetts, in this respect, cannot now be retrieved. While her legislature at intervals through several generations made public grants to the colleges for boys, it left the daughters alone to the thinner diet of the common schools. It may be doubted whether ever again it will be a part of our public policy, to make grants from the treasury to the higher seminaries of either sex, and probably henceforth they must rely upon private liberality, — nor am I by any means confident that in the enlarged wealth of the time this will not be the just policy. It is chiefly observable that this kind of legislation should stop, precisely at the time when the girls' colleges are emerging in divinest array from an age of neglect. And since this is likely to be

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our future public policy, I take special pleasure in saying that the last act of the legislature of Massachusetts granting money from the treasury to a collegiate institution, was an act alike of indemnity and expiation. On a morning in the winter of 1867, when it happened to me to be in the executive office, I received at the state-house the visit of two ladies, the one already then a munificient patroness of this institution, and the other actively connected with its administration, who solicited my co-operation in an endeavor to obtain an act of legislative assistance for Mount Holyoke Seminary. I was deeply impressed by their plea that the commonwealth had never given a dollar to any female seminary. Referring them to a few gentlemen in both houses who might greatly assist them, it only remained for me to assure them, quite in disregard of the proprieties of my office, that if they would procure the passage of the bill through the legislature, it should be signed as quickly as I could read it. I can sincerely say, with pride for myself but with greater pride for Massachusetts, that probably no magistrate ever wrote his name with more alacrity than I felt in affixing mine to an act, which, by the payment of forty thousand dollars out of the treasury to this institution, cast over our coat of arms a fresh light, the light of justice.

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Women Educating the State.

Nothing in the methods of social progress is more propitious than the surrender of the profession of teaching to women. For some years after the adoption of the constitution they were ineligible to this office, and if admitted to perform its duties in the public schools, I believe, they could not by process of law collect their salary. Not only has this wrong been removed, but in our day an entire revolution has overtaken this occupation. In part for reasons of political economy, in part because of a more just estimate of their sex as natural educators, women now constitute nine-tenths of the whole corps of public instructors in the state; they fill the same office in the Normal schools, in all the High schools, in all the higher seminaries; in short, they are supreme everywhere in our education, save in the Technical and Classical schools and the Colleges. No change so broad and radical as this has been witnessed in any other field of social science in modern time. For the future, our citizenship, our magistracy, our history is under their hands. If we contemplate this vast corps on their several planes of power, whether in domestic training or in public instruction, directing the early impressible years as they can be directed only in the sacred retirement of home, or by a genius fit for the occupation conducting the incitements of the class-room, we must acknowledge that the women of this

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generation are performing their part for the preservation of this government. Some persons are doubtless present, who in their walks in Rome have gazed with pride upon the genius of a few of their countrywomen, projected in the image of marble; but I point you to thousands of your countrywomen, in all portions of this land, who are moulding human nature in the spiritual image, which shall survive when marble shall have crumbled. And since this beneficent work has fallen into their hands, it is well for our country that their superiority as educators is especially in the domain of the moral sentiment, for never before has our political condition stood in greater need of those influences. Whenever a blight spreads over the political morals of a people, the remedy has to come from the next generation. It is possible only to a limited extent to modify the evil in men hackneyed in the abuses of public trust; the hope of purification is chiefly to be found in a new blood. It is the memory of ennobling instructions which youth carries into manhood, that supplies the promise of our free institutions. The high qualities of Lord Denman, the soul of honor in every relation he touched, were traced to the governess of his boyhood; and when advanced in his career as Lord Chief Justice of England, he still related with the simplicity of a child his night-

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dreams of Mrs. Barbauld. I look abroad over the fields traversed by the graduates of this institution, now rapidly aproaching two thousand, and I behold them at their work on the national character, — I see them defiling into all the states of the union, infusing the middle ranks of our life with gentleness and strength of culture, — instructors, with Lætitia Barbauld, inculcating the sentiments which will draw around the future citizen the conscious solemnities of responsibility, and purify his discharge of private or public trust, — in the family, with Miss Sedgwick, gracing domestic duties by the relief of studies,—with Caroline Herschel, supplementing the care of the household with the gaze of the heavens, — in the occasional offices of compassion and benevolence as effectually fulfilling the mission of the Lord, as Dorothea Dix or Elizabeth Fry, as Mary Pickard or Sarah Pellatt, — in the common lot of existence, by their elevation of the written and spoken word, as truly promoting the dignity of their own sex and commanding the respect of the other, as if they bore the name of Edgeworth or More, of Jameson or Aiken;—and I follow this influence through the ever lengthening progression of time, until it is lost to sight in the depth of ages.

Such are some of the chief exponents of the benefits which the century has brought to the sex.

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There is a more general but not less impressive feature of her advance in the respect of this age. In this moral and social eminence there is also a higher esteem and homage for her individuality, for her being, simply as woman, than at any former period. Never was there a time before when she was so encompassed by spontaneous honor and veneration. More conspicuously now than ever before, she is reverenced for herself, — because she exists. If it might have been feared that her going forth into the ways of commerce and arts and many industries would dethrone her from the pedestal on which past ages had placed her, experience has shown that her divinity is now encircled by a broader homage than those ages ever knew. It is true, this instinctive deference for her has always existed, lodging itself in the heart of every period, varying with diversities of nations or customs or manners, adapting itself to all the revolutions of thought which have shaken religions and codes, ever standing out as a thing distinct from all other things, — deference for woman. It is equally true, that this manifests itself in our time by acknowledging female ascendency in higher methods and on higher levels than existed in the days of northern invasion, or gallantry of Provence, or self-assertion in revolutionary Paris. There is no doubt that in the gothic periods women made

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a great advance as the recipients of an exaggerated yet genuine adoration, but the modern is the higher and larger style. If in that time they were shielded by gallantry as dependent in their weakness, they are now shielded in equality of rights by the sword of the law, by the hand of man, by the opinion of society. If they were then revered because of their qualities without attainments, they are now revered because of their qualities unfolded by education. If the ancient chivalry threw its arms around them as beings not desecrated by the utilities, the chivalry of our day hedges them with the legions of its law and the angels of its commerce. If the Troubadours adored them for the goddesses they were not, christian men respect them for the women they are. If in the ancient joust knights shivered their lances for beauties whose wits were invented several centuries afterwards by Walter Scott, modern gentlemen would die in earnest for the immortal beauty of womanhood. If in the period of middle-age romance the higher few received those courtesies, the code of modern society raises and guards the whole.

Historically woman is at the acme of her power. The age is in full accord with her, and on whatever ground she steps she commands the sympathy of mankind. Nor to chivalry, nor to law, nor to commerce is her place in all hearts to be exclusively ascribed.

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The inspiration of the masters of thought has spread through modern literature, and from stage to stage has sounded the notes of her progress. The mysteries of her being have met their interpretation in the profound insight and pure conceptions of Milton. Incomparably beyond all others, Shakespeare has uncovered her capacities both for good and for evil, the excesses and the limitations of her nature, the side of her vanity and the side of her glory. In comparatively recent years the bookshelves have been stocking with commentaries from both sexes on the female characters of the great dramatist, until Juliet and Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia, Portia and Beatrice, Lady Macbeth and Katharine of Arragon are familiar as the living. His interpretation of her, piercing as the light of the diamond, is caught up and radiated from every sphere of active thought, from the pulpit and the bar, from novels which are histories and from histories which are novels, from schools, from cottages, from the shops, and his myriad-mind pleads everywhere her cause. How deeply he has touched the fountains of the human heart in all classes, and how closely he has brought man into intelligent sympathy with woman, the stage bears daily witness whenever applause runs from seat to seat over his grand words in her behalf, for love and mercy, for justice and retribution. Addison has been her

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amiable satirist and kindly instructor. Burns still feels the chords of the race with her pathos and plaintive love. I forbear to extend the catalogue. Whilst Swift and Pope and Johnson, who were incapable of being amiable or just to woman, retire from her support, Milton and Shakespeare, Addison and Burns, are read by constantly increasing numbers; the nobility and naturalness, the dignity and tenderness of their sentiments, laid at the shrine of her affections and her wrongs, have passed into the common mind of this age and have become a part of its humane judgment. Over all these inspiring influences, which have aided to bring mankind to the justice of her relations, the lessons of the Master of our holy religion preside and govern, qualifying, exalting, combining them into a harmonious public opinion.

One of the conclusions from the discussions of the century appears to be the settlement of the question of the intellectual equality of the sexes. If you ask how it has been settled: — by the conclusion that there is no question which ever can or ought to be settled at all. If the disputations of the last hundred and fifty years over this question could be collected, the curiosities of literature would be vastly swollen. After bringing the lens of Scotch metaphysics to bear upon it Dugald Stewart decided that all intellectual differences are the

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consequence of difference in education, and Lord Jeffrey, model in learning and fairness of judgment, inclines in the same direction. Other critics equally profound have as positively maintained the opposite opinion. A female writer of marked acumen and liberal learning who has made valuable contributions to our literature, Mrs. Jameson, expresses the opinion, that "the intellect of woman bears the same relation to that of man as her physical organization; it is inferior in power, and different in kind. In men the intellectual faculties exist more self-poised and self-directed, more independent of the rest of the character, than we find them in women; with whom talent, however predominant, is in much greater degree modified by the sympathies and by moral causes." The sum total of the general belief of the most enlightened of both sexes appears to be, that there is a difference of kind in their natural endowments, and that there is for each an appropriate field for development and action. I think we may agree this morning, that woman is the superior in nice perception of minute circumstances, in the force and promptitude of her sympathy, in the courage of her affections and moral sentiments, in all the qualities depending upon excitability of nerve, in her capacity for noble and devoted attachment, in patience, quickness

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and tact, and in a talent which is not defined by the metaphysicians, and which men sometimes find embarrassing to themselves, the gift of second sight. I shall leave for you to determine, whether the sterner sex does or does not excel in the power of close and logical reasoning, in the capacity for investigating questions involving complex and indeterminate elements, in perseverance rather than patience, in concentrated power of attention, in sustained reach of combination and generalization, in creative force, in breadth of judgment and scope of imagination. To what extent education can modify the diversities which exist, whatever they may be, it is unnecessary to inquire, since the approving judgment of our day has on the whole accepted the fact that such diversities do not impair the relative influence of either sex, that neither class of forces is higher than the other in the scale of mind, and that both are essential for the greatest success of the race. In the warfare of life the cavalry and the artillery must co-operate in the achievement of victory.

It is an interesting feature of this subject, that while metaphysicians and partizans have been agitating this question of equality of endowments, each sex has in practice uniformly recognized the superiority of the other. Women always imitate men in intellectual display, always take pride in

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being deemed their equals, always receive from their hand the wreath of honor with complacency; men always seek the critical approval of women, receive their satire as the very edge of truth, care more for the galleries than for the floor, and never feel sure of success if their penetrating eye withholds its acknowledgment. The finer qualities pay tribute to the coarser; the higher qualities predominate over the greater. This practice does not much proceed from mere gallantry or from badinage; it is the rule of conduct of sincere and serious life. It is the triumph of moral power over the intellectual. This reciprocal recognition of superiority, each sex as to the other, is an unerring indication that in ordering the operations of the social system divine Providence established over it this mystic law. It is the tie which binds men and women in the solemn unities of life. It is the happy fiction, if you please, it is the moral unreality, under which each sex is ever courting an exaggerated estimate of itself from the other, — and "goes to the courtship as its prayer," — under which each sex ever concedes it to the other, and is more blessed in giving than in receiving. Under human necessity the laws of states confine certain offices of duty to the stronger, in no derogation of the right or dignity of the weaker; and in turn, by those subtile and beneficent

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influences which nature gave them, which man would not take away if he could, and could not take away if he would, the weaker become the superior, and overshadow alike the law-maker and the law. There is a harmonious inequality, which is better than the most perfect equality. The great christian lyrist has wrought the mysterious incongruities and contradictions of the sexes into matchless shape of reconciliation. After assigning to the lips of Adam in paradise the strongest expressions of his own superiority in mind and inward faculties, in accord, he says, with the prime end of nature, he allows our progenitor to break forth in another and loftier strain:

——— "Yet when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems,
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do, or say,
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best.
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded. Wisdom, in discourse with her,
Loses, discountenanced, and like folly shows.
Authority and reason on her wait,
As one intended first, and not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind, and nobleness, their seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard angelic placed."

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I think the experience of this age has confirmed the opinion of former time as to the relation of woman to the conduct of public affairs. I am not speaking of the particular portion of this subject which is involved in the question of her exercise of the right of suffrage. It is my conviction, on a review of the past, that as the common judgment of both men and women was before adverse to such participation in public affairs, the experience of the century has not changed that opinion. In my apprehension this conclusion is founded in good reason and just sentiment. A most discriminating female writer, who has not been backward in asserting the dignity of her sex, has said, that "women, however well read in history, never generalize in politics, never reason from any broad and general principles, or from past events, their causes and their consequences,—but are political through their affections, prejudices, hopes, fears and personal connections." And you will permit me to inquire, who ever saw a woman set to work to discuss such questions as the proper duties and limitations of legislation, the complex mischief of certain laws and policies, the causes of national wealth, the relations of foreign trade and domestic industry, the field of agriculture and manufactures, the finance and the currency, the laws of population, the management of poverty and mendicity, the theories of taxation,

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the consequences of the public debt, and all public matters upon which the welfare of a state depends. It is not a sufficient answer to this inquiry, to say that she has been kept out of the practice of politics, because, while she has never been prohibited from the study of civil economy, she has never cast the light of reflective wisdom over any one of its fields. Women have ranged with free volition over the whole domain of speculative thought, and the fact that they have either avoided the severities of political economy or have added nothing of value to it, is their own voluntary tribute to the wisdom of the division of duties under which society has so long existed. And distribution of political service indifferently among men and women is so suggestive of confusion, awkwardness and impossibility of progress in domestic life, that the piercing instinct of the female mind very generally rejects it.

This opinion of the sex has become more firmly established by the experiments which have been made in the opposite direction during the century. In the higher circles of the society of France, at a time not now remote, the most intellectual of its women attempted to participate in directing public affairs, and the result has been transmitted to us. They wielded a short, brilliant and fatal power. From their boudoirs and drawing rooms went forth the resultant force of wit enforced by

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beauty, and fallacy masked by flattery. Policies which desolated the kingdom were stimulated in the *salons* of Paris, and from the councils of female partizans came the orders to shed the purest blood of both sexes. The eagle eye of Napoleon took the lesson at a glance, he employed the agency of women for their power at intrigue, and *soignes les femmes* were often his ominous words to his departing embassadors. Under the despotic and aristocratic governments they have more than once undertaken such a share in politics, but it has been a service in the interest of diplomacy and intrigue. The example descended to the common ranks, and the political female clubs of Paris, numbering many thousands of members, even more disorderly than the disorderly clubs of men, were finally suppressed by government — for cause. It is a subject for gratulation, that in this perversion of their nature to incompatible functions both the higher and common orders of the sex in the United States have seen no inducement to claim the right or imitate the example. We cannot fail to behold in contrast the mass of women under the older governments, and under our own. There has not been a more revolting spectacle than the mobs of women run mad with politics, in the first French revolution, in London in 1780, in Paris again at the close of the last war with Prussia, in which everything of

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the possible hideous cast its shadow upon history. But, according to the light within them, they moved on the lower plane in the same sphere in which their more cultivated exemplars moved on the higher plane; and such will ever be the relation of the higher example to the inferior imitation. Different has been the conduct of the women of America. In the more elevated and educated ranks they have never brought their accomplishments and virtues into the arena of political turmoil. From the days in which Mrs. Hancock, the wife of the President of the Congress, amid the excitements of that trying epoch, exemplified the modesty, the dignity and the discretion which John Adams has transmitted to us for her memorial, down to our own time, they have followed more pure and comely methods of influence. And their example, also, has not been without its following. Among the whole mass of the women of the United States the order of social existence has been exempt from the rude display of political action. Amid the passions of our politics we too have passed through many mobs, but who ever heard of an American woman appearing on that dread theatre in her Amazonian armor? But while they instinctively avoid exposing both soul and body to the uncongenial attrition of political affairs, they have not failed, in periods of greatest excitement, within the pale of their

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fitness but to farthest extent of human benevolence, to discharge the noblest of all duties to the state. In the awful period of the late war, leaving to man the sterner obligations of patriotism, woman was yet in every work of mercy, in the weakened household, in sanitary preparation, in the labors of the hospital, in the house of prayer, at the burial of the brave.

I trust we have not yet receded so far from the days of Dr. Franklin's benignity and wisdom, that his influence, so pre-eminent over the other sex in his lifetime, may not still be cherished with tender regard by their successors. In one of his letters to a granddaughter he gave this quaint and candid advice: "You are very prudent not to engage in party disputes. Women should not meddle with party politics, except in the endeavor to reconcile their husbands, brothers and friends, who happen to be of contrary sides. If your sex keep cool, you may be the means of cooling ours the sooner, and restoring more speedily that social harmony among fellow-citizens which is so desirable after long and bitter dissensions." I desire to echo Dr. Franklin's good counsel, in the hope that men may continue to feel, for another century at least, that in consulting a wife, a mother, or a sister on these subjects of excitement, they are appealing from their own passions and prejudices, and not to them, embodied in

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a second self. I trust that the members of this institution will concur with me in wishing far off the day when their ranks, like too many of the young men in their own schools, shall be swept into the vortex of dispute about public men and public affairs. If, however, there be any who look with favor upon such employment of their time, I beg leave to ask their listening ear to a pleasantry of Addison: "There is nothing so bad for the face as party-zeal. It gives an ill-natured cast to the eye, and a disagreeable sourness to the look; besides, that it makes the lines too strong, and flushes them worse than brandy. I have seen a woman's face break out in heats, as she has been talking against a great lord, whom she never saw in her life; and, indeed, I never knew a party-woman that kept her beauty for a twelve-month. I would therefore advise all my female friends, as they value their complexion, to let alone all disputes of this nature; though, at the same time, I would give free liberty to all superannuated motherly partizans to be as violent as they please, since there will be no danger either of their spoiling their faces, or of their gaining converts."

If it be asked, what then is woman's sphere:—the answer has already been furnished by her own intelligent judgment and practice under the best civilization which the world has had. The choice has

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rested with her, and she has not made it in doubt or hesitation. She has properly refused to be limited or controlled by certain worn-out catch-phrases, of which one would shut her up for life as a nurse to the sick-chamber, and another would consign her to silence as a prude, or to seclusion as a nun. She is right in agreeing with Sydney Smith, that woman cannot afford to be compassionate from eight o'clock in the morning to twelve o'clock at night. The modern economies have met her on this ground, and have thrown open to her the most respectable, the most delicate and the most responsible occupations; and she has taken to them with an exhilaration that belongs only to the noblest nature. She is satisfied,—it is only the inquisitor, still ringing the question of her sphere, who is dissatisfied. She adheres to the standard by which the graces of her character have been measured in the advancing ideas of the last half century. It is her choice to regard herself as an integral part of the plan of social and domestic order, out of which it is no wish of hers to be agitated and jostled into arenas alien to her nature. It is within her own consciousness that woman is the core and centre of a nation of homes; it is within her own knowledge that history, literature and religion show the advancement of a nation to be in its homes. This is a trite doctrine, but not triter

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than the solar system, or the geological formations, nor any the less important. After trial, the family institution is the world's method; without the appropriate distribution of its duties, that must dissolve away; and therefore whatever weakens her empire there, puts in peril the whole vast fabric. She is the adjuster of society, the standard of its moral sanctions and its purest sentiments, the beginning and the end of its natural and acquired æsthetics. It is in the daily and smaller habitudes of life that all classes find the average of their stimulations and pleasures; and her presence there is inspiration, her direction there is better than law and good as a perpetual song. She is the ingenious manager of the national manners, which we underestimate. "Manners,"—said Burke—"Manners are of more importance than laws. The law touches us but here and there, now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, irreversible operation, like that of the air we breathe. They give the whole form and color to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they destroy them." I may add, that woman is their queen and their law-giver. In no country so much as in ours is it needed to bear in mind, that according to her quality will be their quality. In no other country

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